

USDAnews

USDA's Employee News Publication—For You & About You!

USDA's Budget For FY 2005 Is Signed Into Law

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

It was preceded by three governmentwide short-term funding bills or "continuing resolutions"—but USDA's budget appropriation for FY 2005 was ultimately signed into law on December 8, 69 days into the new fiscal year that began on October 1, 2004. USDA's budget was part of an omnibus appropriations package that included the budgets for several other federal departments.

What follows are some highlights of the Department's budget for FY 2005 thought to be of particular interest to USDA employees.

Steve Dewhurst, director of the Office of Budget & Program Analysis, said that USDA's FY 2005 budget provides over \$87.6 billion in funding. That figure includes a \$4.24 billion appropriation for the Forest Service which, for budget purposes, is part of the "Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations," which was also part of the overall omnibus appropriations package.

The \$87.6 billion funding, the end product of congressional conference committee efforts and negotiations with executive branch budget officials, compares to nearly \$85.3 billion in budget authority originally passed by the U.S. House of Representatives, nearly \$85.7 billion passed by the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee, and \$85.1 billion in budget authority

requested by the administration of President **George W. Bush** as part of its FY 2005 government-wide budget proposal.

The original budget proposal for USDA called for a federal staffing level for FY 2005 of 99,048 full-time equivalent positions, or federal staff years. That would have represented a decrease of 2,621 federal staff years from the FY 2004 federal staff year ceiling which was estimated on February 2, 2004 to be at 101,669.

As detailed in a story in the January-February 2004 issue of the **USDA News**, at least 7 USDA agencies or staff offices had reflected proposed increases in federal staff years, and at least 2 had reflected proposed decreases from FY 2004 federal staff year levels.

However, based on the funding figure passed into law, Dewhurst projected that the federal staff years for many USDA agencies would basically remain at FY 2004 levels.

OBPA Associate Director **Larry Wachs** noted that USDA's final budget for FY 2005 includes these items thought to be of particular interest to USDA employees:

① It is to fund a 3.5 percent pay increase for non-Senior Executive Service employees at USDA, starting in January 2005. Pay levels for SES employees are determined through a separate performance-based pay system.

② It requires an across-the-board cut of 0.8 percent for all discretionary spending. Agencies funded under the "Interior and

continued on pg. 2...



"Kelly, are you able to see what scenario they're gonna throw our way next?" quips Burns, Ore.-based APHIS pilot **Jack Hodnett** (left), as he and Belen, N.M.-based fellow APHIS pilot **Kelly Hobbs** cope with their instructor's latest challenge inside APHIS's new instrument simulator. This computerized simulator is at APHIS's new Aviation Training Center in Cedar City, Utah. The Center provides several one-of-a-kind features—and pilots from APHIS and FS who fly light-weight, low-level aircraft as part of their mission can use the new facility to perfect emergency maneuvers and learn how to more easily recognize signs of trouble. Note **Hallie Pickhardt's** story on page 4. —PHOTO BY HALLIE PICKHARDT

When We Leave USDA, Our Federal Records Don't Go With Us

They Add To The "Institutional Memory"

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

Staffing turnovers are a reality in government, and USDA is no exception. As the second term of President **George W. Bush** begins in January 2005, personnel at all levels will invariably be departing the Department.

But, as they leave, their federal office records are to remain behind.

That's one of the key points in USDA's Departmental Regulation 3080-001, dated April 30, 2004 and titled "Records Management." The 33-page document advises that, "Agency records material are

the property of the Federal government, not the property of individual employees, and may not be removed from the Department without proper authority."

"After a presidential election, irrespective of the outcome, it's always a good time to raise this issue," noted **Barbara LaCour**, USDA's Records Officer in the Office of the Chief Information Officer. "But this issue applies to any employee who leaves USDA at any time."

"It also applies to persons who do work for USDA under contract—and there are more persons who fit that category now than there were four years ago."

LaCour explained that "federal records" are defined by law as all documentary materials—regardless of physical form—that (1)

continued on pg. 7...



Ann M. Veneman

Secretary of Agriculture

As we near the end of President **George W. Bush's** first term in office, it is a good time to reflect on the many advances and accomplishments we have achieved at USDA. With your hard work, we met many challenges and delivered historic results.

Shortly after taking office, our country was confronted with the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Europe. But our strong response helped prevent the disease from entering the United States. That disease outbreak led us to take significant steps to fortify protection systems and after 9/11, we made more improvements in homeland security to protect food and agriculture, as well as our employees.

We dealt effectively with BSE and avian influenza and we eradicated Exotic Newcastle disease.

Exports of American agricultural products in 2004 reached a projected all-time high of \$62 billion, making solid contributions to farm income and supporting about 930,000 U.S. jobs, about 40 percent of which are in rural areas.

We have also worked to expand markets for agricultural products by developing alternate uses, such as ethanol and biodiesel. For example, U.S. production of ethanol from corn rose from 60 million gallons in the mid-1970s to an estimated 3.4 billion gallons in 2004.

Many agencies helped to implement the most complex Farm Bill in history quickly and efficiently and made a historic commitment to expanding conservation tools to working lands.

We focused our research to develop solutions to emerging issues in food safety, obesity, and the environment. And we paved new roads in the

area of genomics research to set the course in a new frontier of agricultural science.

President Bush sought to make the federal government a better steward of public lands and his Healthy Forests Initiative delivered on that promise helping us to defend our national forests against the risk of devastating wildfires while protecting lives and property, habitats, and ecosystems.

We have fed those in need, here and around the world, and we are helping farmers everywhere unleash the power of science and technology so they can become better producers of food and fiber.

USDA has made great strides in implementing the President's Management Agenda including our eGovernment Initiative, which is making more and more of our programs and services available online to producers and consumers. We have received a clean financial audit for the third year in a row.

The farm economy is in a position of historic strength with record net cash farm income, record equity and record production and yields for many commodities.

The President selected an outstanding leader, Nebraska Governor **Mike Johanns**, to be Secretary for the second term. I have no doubt that he will continue the strong leadership tradition at USDA and build on the many accomplishments this Administration has achieved during its first term.

I leave with great admiration for the remarkable work that USDA employees do every day. I also leave with memories of great friendships and working relationships with so many of you. My thanks for all you have done and continue to do for America. Best wishes for a happy holiday season and peace and prosperity in the New Year. ■

USDA's Budget...continued from pg. 1

Related Agencies Appropriations," including FS, face an additional 0.594 percent cut for discretionary spending.

③ It provides about \$125 million—an increase of \$6 million from FY 2004—to upgrade technology in county office service centers. This provides for the continued replacement of aging business and technology systems with a Common Computing Environment (CCE) in those offices. That will allow the service center agencies (Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Rural Development) to share data among themselves and their customers and to streamline business processes. Implementation of the CCE began in 1998 and most of its major hardware and software components are in place. This is all designed to increase the ability of USDA customers to interact with USDA staffers over the Internet, so as to save time and money.

④ It requests that the Government Accountability Office provide a report by March 1, 2005 on the coordination of USDA and the Department of Homeland Security regarding the protection of the U.S. agriculture sector, including activities at the DHS Plum Island Animal Disease Center in New York and the effectiveness of the federal Agricultural Quarantine Inspection program and other federal inspection activities.

tion activities.

⑤ It provides nearly \$20 million for the Office of Civil Rights, almost \$2 million above the funding for FY 2004, to fund the highest priority needs.

⑥ It provides over \$7.1 million to the Food Safety and Inspection Service for entry-level training for field employees, food safety regulatory essentials training, and biosecurity training.

⑦ It provides \$298 million—an increase of \$187 million from FY 2004—to support the Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative. Within this increase, \$121 million is provided to modernize the USDA National Centers for Animal Health in Ames, Iowa, and \$33 million is provided to enhance the National Animal Identification Program to more quickly track animal diseases. An additional \$33 million is provided to improve national surveillance capabilities to monitor terrorist threats to the U.S. food supply and agricultural production and processing.

⑧ It replaces the FS Recreation Fee Demonstration Program with a new ten-year authority for the Forest Service to collect user fees at designated recreation sites. Most of the fees collected are to be spent on the sites where they are collected to enhance services and improve facilities.

⑨ To avoid disrupting non-fire programs, it



"Let's alter the terrain and change the weather," suggests APHIS's Brad Neill (left). He and a colleague are in a side room programming the simulated aerial scenarios for a pilot seated at the controls inside APHIS's new state-of-the-art flight simulator. Note Hallie Pickhardt's story on page 4.—PHOTO BY HALLIE PICKHARDT

provides an extra \$400 million for fire operations in case appropriations for fire activities are exhausted. This authority is the same as what was given in 2004, when the Forest Service did not have to borrow from other programs to fight wildland fires.

⑩ It provides nearly \$13 million to continue the design and implementation of a backup data center for the National Finance Center in New Orleans. No money had been provided for this in FY 2004.

⑪ It contains provisions that limit the use of funds for a 'competitive sourcing activity'—or 'outsourcing'—in certain areas of the Department. ■

Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

In mid-November Secretary **Ann M. Veneman** and Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services **J.B. Penn** as well as Chief Economist **Keith Collins** held a tele-news conference with reporters to discuss new farm income figures. The Secretary announced \$18.1 million in Small Business Innovation Research grants and \$78 million in funding for the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program. The Secretary also extended for 90 days the program to donate non-fat dry milk to non-profit, faith-based, and community organizations for use in meal services or for distribution to needy recipients; made food aid available to alleviate suffering in Sudan; and announced the 1890 National Scholars for the 2004 academic school year.

On December 2, President **George W. Bush** nominated Nebraska Governor **Mike Johanns** to be the next Secretary of Agriculture. In a statement Secretary Veneman said, "I congratulate Governor Johanns on being named today by the President to serve as the 28th U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. He is a good friend whom I've worked with closely over the years to advance agriculture policy and trade opportunities for America's farmers and ranchers. The President selected an outstanding leader who has a distinguished career in public service and a clear understanding of agriculture and farm policies."

Farm Income: In November, the Economic Research Service reported that net cash farm income for calendar year 2004 is forecast at \$77.5 billion. This is an increase of about \$9 billion over last year and far above the previous record of \$60.9 billion in 1997. Secretary Veneman told reporters that, "Farmers' cash receipts are forecast to reach a record \$233.4

billion in 2004, fully \$22 billion over 2003. Despite BSE and other animal disease issues, livestock industries accounted for the majority of that \$22 billion increase, \$16 billion to be exact, compared to a \$6 billion increase for crops. While the cash flow to the farm sector is extraordinary, the overall financial health remains very strong. Farmers' equity for 2004 is forecast to reach a record level of \$1.22 trillion, up from a revised \$1.18 trillion in 2003. Significantly, this is a prosperity that is broadly shared across all of American agriculture including virtually every crop and livestock subsector of American agriculture," she said.

Small Business Innovative Research:

Secretary Veneman awarded \$18.1 million to 129 small businesses in 42 states. The fiscal year 2004 funds "will help qualified small businesses conduct innovative research on important agricultural problems that could lead to significant public benefit," Veneman said. Examples of the 8-month Phase I research projects include investigation into: improved quality soy-oil based biodiesel fuel and an advanced system for early detection of feedlot diseases and improved animal tracking. Two-year Phase II grants build on Phase I research and include: genetic screening to identify rice varieties with enhanced value-added properties; the creation of a vaccine for farmed salmon to protect against an important infectious disease; and a procedure to enhance fruit juice concentration processes.

Farm And Ranch Lands Protection Program:

State, tribal, and local governments and nongovernmental organizations have until mid-March 2005 to submit proposals to receive matching funds from USDA to protect soils and histori-



On behalf of the Combined Federal Campaign, the Forest Service's own "Blues Rangers" perform before a packed audience at USDA's Jefferson Auditorium in Washington, DC on November 18. Members of the group—all from the De Soto National Forest in southern Mississippi—include (L to R) FS ecologist/botanist **Tate Thriffley**, FS volunteer **Stuart Snyder** (on drums), FS wildlife biologist **Dave Allen**, and FS timber sale representative **Wayne Stone**. "Using both traditional and contemporary blues," explained Thriffley, "we sing about natural resource issues—with an emphasis on challenges to our national forests such as invasive species and hazardous fuels." Note the related photo on the back cover.—**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH**

cal and archaeological sites. Secretary Veneman made \$78 million available for this purpose in late November. "This program helps ensure that valuable, productive land is protected," said Veneman. "The funds will be used to purchase conservation easements to limit conversion of farm and ranch lands to nonagricultural uses." Through 2003 more than 300,000 acres have been protected in 42 states.

Food Aid: In December, the Bush Administration donated 200,000 metric tons of wheat to relieve suffering and avert famine in Sudan. Conflict in the Darfur region threatens millions of people with starvation. "These steps will provide relief to those in need. The United States is the largest donor addressing the serious food shortages in Africa. The President has made it clear that whatever other challenges and obligations the United States has at home and abroad, global hunger remains a U.S. priority," Veneman said. The donation, from the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust, is expected to meet the needs of 2.5 to 3 million Sudanese over a five-month period.

1890's Scholars: Thirty new

1890's scholars were selected in December to attend Land Grant colleges and universities. "Our nation's 1890 colleges and universities are important partners in developing future agricultural leaders to ensure diversity in agriculture," said Veneman. USDA's goal, through this partnership, is to hire successful graduates into career positions at USDA. Since the inception of the National Scholars Program in 1992, USDA has funded a total of 362 national scholars. Each scholar is required to work one year at USDA for each year of the scholarship.

The mission of the land grant system is teaching, research, and outreach and was initiated by President **Abraham Lincoln** with the Morrill Act of 1862. A second Morrill Act was passed in 1890 as many freed slaves and African Americans were denied access to land grant schools in Southern states. The passage of this bill brought educational opportunities in technical, military, and agricultural sciences to the general working class population who had no other access to higher levels of learning. For more information go to: <http://1890scholars.program.usda.gov>

—**PATRICIA KLINTBERG**

Employees *make these things happen*

Marketing and Regulatory Programs

For Our USDA Pilots: A State-Of-The-Art Simulator

The flying conditions were treacherous for **Joe Harris**, an Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service pilot in training with the agency's Wildlife Services Program. The rain was pouring down and thunder and lightning lit up the dark sky.

Suddenly, Harris's small, lightweight plane stalled and started to spin out of control.

Such a scenario could send even the most grizzled and experienced pilots into a panic. But not Harris. He simply pointed the nose of his Husky-model aircraft toward the ground, leveled the wings, and quickly recovered from the spin—all while sitting comfortably in a state-of-the-art flight simulator with wraparound screens and a motion base that made it feel like the real deal.

"The possibility of going into a spin doesn't scare me anymore," said Harris. "This training has built up my confidence, and I feel like now I know how to avoid the pitfalls."

The custom-built simulator is at the agency's new Aviation Training Center in Cedar City, Utah. It is the only simulator of its kind in the world that can replicate a spin—and the only aviation training ground of its kind for low-level flight.

Pilots with APHIS's Wildlife Services Program are to spend two weeks in training at the Center each year, perfecting emergency maneuvers and learning how to more easily recognize advance warnings of trouble.

That's important, because across the country this particular APHIS program—and its pilots—play a vital role in preventing the spread of wildlife diseases and protecting agricultural and natural resources from damage caused by wildlife. The program's wildlife specialists employ a number of tools to carry out this work—but it's only through the use of aircraft that the Wildlife Services Program can, for instance, distribute millions of oral raccoon rabies vaccines in the eastern U.S., effectively manage predators in the western U.S., and monitor and track wolves that have been reintroduced into areas where they were once extinct.

While the prospect of going into a fatal spin may seem remote, it's not out of the realm of

possibility for the Program's 60-plus full-time and contract pilots. In order to carry out the Program's mission, they must fly low to the ground and slow—two factors that make flying much more challenging.

"In low-level aviation the stall-spin scenario usually doesn't have a positive outcome," said **Brad Neill**, APHIS's aviation training officer who runs the Utah facility. "We want our pilots to be able to take instinctive corrective action. But more importantly, we want them to be able to recognize the potential for these types of problems before they happen."

In addition to the motion-base simulator, the Center also has an instrument flight simulator and a lightweight, single-engine, aerobatic Decathlon plane with specially designed wings and a fuel/oil system that—safely—allows inverted flight. Once the pilots in training master spin recovery in the simulator, they move on to the Decathlon plane and practice their skills in the air.

"The beauty of the Aviation Training Center is that you can make a lot of mistakes and learn from them," said **Lloyd Burraston**, the national aviation manager for APHIS's Wildlife Services Program based at the agency's Western Regional Office in Fort Collins, Colo. "By contrast, in the real world you may not get a second chance."

After three Wildlife Services plane crashes in the late 1990s and a subsequent independent program review, Wildlife Services managers began making changes to its pilot training curriculum. Burraston began researching additional training opportunities—and came up with the idea of establishing a training center dedicated to expertise in low-level flight.

He first pitched the idea in 2002. A year later, in August 2003, what was previously an empty 7,200 square-foot hanger at the Cedar City, Utah Municipal Airport opened its doors as the Wildlife Services Program's new Aviation Training Center. "Our state-of-the-art technology enables intense training that isn't available elsewhere," Burraston underscored.

For example, low-level maneuvers such as the "yo-yo" and the "scissors"—which were once used in combat during World War II—are now

employed at the Center to help APHIS's pilots track and monitor reintroduced wolf populations, remove predators that attack sheep and livestock, and assist States with wildlife disease eradication, such as in the case of chronic-wasting disease.

Other Federal agencies that employ pilots—such as the Forest Service and the Federal Aviation Administration—will be sending pilots to the Center for training. **Ron Hanks**, FS's National Aviation Safety and Training Manager based in Boise, Idaho, explained that, like APHIS's pilots who must fly close to the ground, FS pilots often typically fly a mere 100 feet above raging forest fires to determine the best tactical approach for larger planes that will follow and then drop water and retardant on the fires.

"We have unique needs," Hanks said. "Staffers at the Center understand those needs because Wildlife Services pilots do the same type of low-level flying in mountainous regions that we do. That's something that a commercial outfit has a hard time duplicating."

The Center has been fully operational since July. And, Burraston noted, plans are in the beginning stages for a custom-built helicopter simulator that would be used to train the Program's helicopter pilots.

"The potential," he affirmed, "is limitless."

—**HALLIE PICKHARDT**



*"Off I go, into the wild blue yonder—sort of," declares **Joe Dory**, an APHIS pilot based in Caldwell, Idaho. In actuality, he is busy manipulating the controls in a flight simulator. The state-of-the-art simulator includes wraparound screens and a motion base that makes flying feel like the real deal—which is why there are protective bars on its right side.—**PHOTO BY HALLIE PICKHARDT***

Natural Resources and Environment

Holiday Tree From FS Again Graces Capitol

For the first time ever, Virginia has provided this year's Capitol Holiday Tree—which is now lit and ready for viewing on the west lawn of the

U.S. Capitol, facing the Washington Monument in Washington, DC.

This year's tree, which came from the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests in western Virginia, is a 79-year-old, 5,500-pound,

65-foot red spruce. "Its inner bark is a blushing red, while its needles are bright green," observed **Pat Sheridan**, Forest Service district ranger on the Warm Springs Ranger District in Highland County, Va.

Editor's Roundup

USDA's people in the news



Peter Thomas is the administrator of the Rural Business-Cooperative Service.

Before joining USDA, Thomas had spent over 14 years—from 1997-2004 and also during the mid-1990s and late 1980s—as president of Bay State Strategies, a Boston-based government relations firm he had founded that aids private sector businesses in identifying business opportunities that exist within federal and local governmental agencies. During essentially that same time frame he also served as the managing director of Eddington Hotspur Inc., an international real estate development firm.

Thomas worked as chief of staff for [then] U.S. Rep. **Peter Torkildsen** (R-Mass.) from 1995-97. From 1991-92 he was based in Boston as the special assistant for the New England Region of the U.S. Small Business Administration. He founded and served

from 1985-90 as president of the Boston-based National Foundation for Economic Research, a non-partisan organization focusing, through research and public policy, on the principals of free enterprise. From 1981-85 he served as the Boston-based New England Regional Administrator of the U.S. General Services Administration.

John Rosso, the previous administrator of RBS, retired from that position following nearly 10 years of federal service. ■



Caird Rexroad is the associate administrator for national programs in the Agricultural Research Service.

From January 2002 until his selection for this position Rexroad served as acting associate administrator in ARS. From 1997-2002 he was the associate deputy administrator for animal production, product value, and safety with ARS's Na-

tional Program Staff, based in Beltsville, Md., where he managed ARS programs on animal health, animal production, food safety, and human nutrition.

Rexroad served as research leader of ARS's Gene Evaluation and Mapping Laboratory in Beltsville from 1992-97, where he directed research on the discovery of DNA markers to improve selection, in dairy cattle, based on disease resistance and production traits. He began his career with ARS as an animal scientist in Beltsville in 1974, concentrating his hands-on research in the field of introducing new genes into farm animals.

This is a newly revised position as part of an ARS headquarters reorganization in July 2004. ■



Antoinette Betschart is the associate administrator for research operations and management in the Agricultural Research Service.

From November 1997 until her selection for this position Betschart served as the area director of ARS's Pacific West Area, headquartered in Albany, Calif. She was director of ARS's Western Regional Research Center in Albany from 1991-97. From 1989-91 she was the research leader of the Cereal Products Research Unit at the Center.

Betschart served as the research leader of the Center's Nutrients Research Unit from 1980-89. From 1974-80 she worked as the project leader of the Center's oilseed protein research project. She began her career with the agency as a research food technologist with the Center's Cereal Grains Laboratory in 1971.

This is a newly revised position as part of an ARS headquarters reorganization in July 2004. ■



Don Arnette is the regional administrator of the Food and Nutrition Service's Southeast Region.

...continued from pg. 4

Donna Wilson, FS public affairs specialist on the George Washington-Jefferson NFs, added that the Capitol Holiday Tree is provided each year by one of the nation's 155 national forests.

This is the 33rd Capitol Holiday Tree that has been donated to Congress by the Forest Service, according to **Beverly Carroll**, an FS program analyst and national coordinator for the Capitol Holiday Tree. "They were donated," she pointed out, "with the support of state and local communities, for use as the Capitol Tree."

That particular tree, which was ultimately selected by **Matthew Evans**, the landscape architect of the U.S. Capitol, was initially discovered by **Dave Armstrong**, an FS engineer on the George Washington-Jefferson NFs. He discovered it on the Warm Springs Ranger District.

Russ MacFarlane is the forest silviculturalist, or tree care specialist, on the George Washington-Jefferson NFs. "Red spruces are known to drop their needles at the sound of a saw," he quipped. "So we had some concern about needle retention on the selected tree."

Then some local Christmas tree growers alerted him to the existence of a "needle retention agent." So one week before the cutting of the

tree, and again 12 hours afterward, the tree was sprayed with a total of 70 gallons of the solution.

MacFarlane also noted that, as a precautionary measure to compensate for the possibility of broken branches on the tree, plus to fill up any holes or gaps in the tree's form, the coordinators of this FS project had so-called 'prosthetic branches' cut from nearby trees, and those branches then came with the Capitol Holiday Tree to Washington, DC.

Mike Tripp, an FS engineer on the George Washington-Jefferson NFs, explained that normally the annual Capitol Holiday Tree can be removed from the originating national forest by use of a crane and a tractor-trailer. "But in this case," he recounted, "because of the remoteness of the site we found it necessary to use a logging helicopter to remove that tree."

JoBeth Brown, public affairs officer on the George Washington-Jefferson NFs, said the Capitol Holiday Tree arrived in Washington, DC on November 29. She added that much of the tree's journey and related activities were funded through sponsors and donations.

Karen Overcash, an FS land management planning specialist on the George Washington-Jefferson NFs, noted that this year's tree is deco-

rated with over 4,500 ornaments, made primarily by students throughout the state of Virginia.

Carroll said the Capitol Holiday Tree—also called the "People's Tree"—is not to be confused with the National Christmas Tree, which grows on the Ellipse behind the White House.

The 2004 Capitol Holiday Tree, which was formally lit on December 9, will be lit each evening until December 27.

—RON HALL



Visitors peer through the "zipper window" in the plastic wrap covering this year's Capitol Holiday Tree—during the tree's stop in Monterey, Va., along its journey to Washington, DC. As they check it out, **Mike Evans** (left), an FS law enforcement officer with the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area on the George Washington-Jefferson National Forests, recounts stories to them about the tree's trek thus far.—PHOTO BY JIM STROUP

headquartered in Atlanta.

From August 2001 until his selection for this position Arnette served as FNS's deputy administrator for management, based at its headquarters office in Alexandria, Va. He was the deputy regional administrator of FNS's Southwest Region, headquartered in Dallas, from 1998-2001. He served as the Southwest Region's Food Stamp Program Director from 1988-98. From 1983-88 he served as director of field operations in that regional office, after having been its district manager for field operations from 1980-83.

Arnette worked as the officer-in-charge of FNS's field office in Hous-

ton from 1976-79. He began his career with FNS as a food program specialist in the agency's Baton Rouge field office in 1973.

Virgil Conrad, the previous regional administrator of FNS's Southeast Region, retired from that position following 21 years of federal service, all with FNS. ■



"Grimmia leshner-ae"

sounds like it might be the name of a professor at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wiz-

ardry in the **Harry Potter** series of books, or possibly one of the provinces of Middle Earth in the *"Lord of the Rings"* trilogy.

Okay, maybe it's not that exotic, but it *is* rather important. It refers to a unique type of moss—and it was recently named after the USDA employee who discovered it.

Robin Leshner is a Forest Service ecologist based at Mount Lake Terrace, Wash., on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. One of her responsibilities is to help create a comprehensive inventory of the forested and non-forested plant communities on several National Forests in western Washington State.

"That means we inventory areas on those National Forests that are heavily forested with different types of trees—as well as areas that are devoid of trees but instead have shrubs, mosses, lichens, and other vegetation," she explained. "And it helps us to broaden the understanding of, and the acceptance of, ecosystem management of our National Forests."

In August 1998 she was conducting an eight-day field survey of vegetation growing in the backcountry of the Glacier Peak wilderness area on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. This included trekking at an

continued on pg. 7...

PROFILE PLUS *More About: Colien Hefferan*



The administrator of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service was one of those kids who liked science and math. But she also had a practical side. **Colien Hefferan** realized that economics and business, especially as they apply to the food and agricultural industry, were a good way to apply those interests. So she doesn't have just one degree in economics but three. She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Arizona and both Master of Science and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Illinois.

Hefferan then taught at Penn State and the University of Maryland and was a research fellow at the Australian National University in Canberra. Her work focused on economic trends that influenced families and consumers—a great background for her first job at USDA as an economist with the Family Economics Research Group within the Agricultural Research Service. With the establishment of CSREES, Hefferan was named the deputy administrator for competitive research grants and awards management. Beginning in 1995 she moved to the Office of the Administrator where she was either the acting or the associate administrator of the agency until 2000.

Since then she has overseen the agency that helps the nation advance agriculture by developing and applying the best science available to food, fiber, forestry production, and use. "One of agriculture's biggest problems is the public doesn't perceive it as a science-based industry or an international industry. But we are very committed to making sure people understand the nature and value of agricultural science. We don't have cheap and available food just by accident," Hefferan said.

By linking resources such as the land grant universities, including historically black 1890 colleges and universities and 32 tribal colleges, to find solutions to problems in agriculture, "we really add a lot of value to government," Hefferan said. For example, it took scientists only 21 days to map the genome of the SARS virus, because they drew from methods developed through a CSREES/National Science Foundation-funded program in microbial genomics methodology used to detect a plant virus. "So we had developed a methodology in agricultural science that could be lifted and used elsewhere," she said.

About two-thirds of CSREES's \$1.1 billion budget supports university-based agricultural experiment stations and other federal research programs including the National Research Initiative (NRI). CSREES makes about 2,500 competitive grants each year under the NRI and last year tapped 2,000 scientists as peer review panelists to help in the process.

Then there is the Small Innovations Research Grants that help small businesses use agricultural science to create new enterprises. One such grant proposed to develop hypoallergenic shrimp to meet a growing market need. "We also support through research and our grants programs hundreds, perhaps thousands, of assistantships, making USDA a substantial contributor to agricultural education," she said.

CSREES also supports the extension service and informal education for farmers and ranchers that includes risk management, food safety, and animal and plant science education, as well as agricultural leadership development.

The agency is also working on a long-range project to create 'eExtension.' "A consortium of land grant universities working with us will take information on the whole range of extension issues and make it available in both a Q & A and teaching format via the Internet. So if a person wanted to find out about a pest in the garden, in just a few keystrokes, he'd have access to all of the expertise nationwide that the ag universities have available on that subject," Hefferan said.

"We also support a small program with a big network of people across the country better known as Ag in the Classroom. It involves other USDA agencies and thousands of teachers who develop and implement curricula in the K through 12 program mostly aimed at helping people understand where their food comes from," she said. The agency is working on a new program aimed at emphasizing agricultural science in high school science.

CSREES is also the national headquarters for 4-H, which serves 7 million young people and has 650,000 volunteers. "Its basic premise is learning by doing," Hefferan said. "While agricultural projects are still the majority of things they do, 4-H is best thought of as a leadership development program."

Last Book Read: *"Begging for Change"* by **Robert Egger**, president of the DC Central Kitchen

Last Movie Seen: *"National Treasure"*

Hobbies: "The beach, reading, and needlework."

Favorite Weekend Breakfast: "French Toast with a variety of fruit chopped up and dumped on top."

Priorities In The Months Ahead: "To continue to improve our competitive programs. Also, to help citizens understand the value of science and agriculture—in other words, to improve the public perception of the credibility of agricultural science. CSREES is committed to developing new ways to deliver agricultural information to customers. The 'eExtension' system, which is still in development, coupled with our new website, are ways that we have focused on making sure that the most up-to-date science education is available to anybody, anytime."

—**PATRICIA KLINTBERG**

elevation of over 5,800 feet on Snowking Mountain, in a non-forested area that consists of raw glacial rubble, exposed outcroppings of barren granite rocks, and a bare minimum of vegetation.

"As part of our standard inventory, we examine literally all forms of growth in our inventory area," she noted. "So that means I collected some samples of moss on the granite rocks in our inventory area. But frankly, I didn't realize that one of those samples that I was bagging, tagging, and labeling might be a new plant species."

After Lesher returned to her home base she sent several of the samples to **David Wagner**, the head scientist at the Northwest Botanical Institute in Eugene, Ore. "He was under contract to assist us in identifying the literally thousands of samples we ecologists were collecting from the various ecology plots on the National Forests," she said.

Wagner was puzzled by one of Lesher's specimens. So, unable to classify it, in 2001 he sent it to **Henk Greven**, a Netherlands-based world-renowned expert on "Grimmia," which is a particular group of mosses.

Lesher said that the distinguishing part of this particular moss is its reproductive structure—whose stalk has a distinctive left-handed twist. By contrast, all other grimmias twist to the right.

Lesher pointed out that that stalk is only about

a millimeter long, and there are 25 millimeters in an inch. And the plant itself, when fully grown, stands less than one-fourth of an inch tall. "So," she observed, "I'm not surprised that I didn't notice its uniqueness right there at the time."

But Greven *did* notice that—and appreciated how unique that was. So unique, in fact, that he followed up with Lesher to get more information about this plant. And he ultimately wrote about this discovery in a book titled "*Grimmias of the World*," published in 2003. In the book he emphasized that this new discovery is "a characteristic species that will not be confused with other Grimmias." The book reflects that Greven—as the acknowledged ultimate authority on these matters—had named this newly-discovered moss after Lesher—"Grimmia lesherae."

Lesher explained that she first found out about her 'name fame' when Greven e-mailed her, early in 2002, requesting permission to name the new discovery after her. "I e-mailed him back right away," she recounted, "saying that I would be absolutely honored."

At last count, USDA has over 112,000 full-time, part-time, and temporary employees located around the country and at agricultural posts overseas. A number are scientists—so hasn't this 'name fame' happened before?

Sandy Miller Hays is the director of the Agricultural Research Service's Information Staff. She explained that, in the past, ARS scientists *have* had plants—as well as a few bacteria—named after them. "But the naming generally didn't happen until after they had retired from the agency," she noted.

By contrast, Lesher is still a full-time employee with the Forest Service. "And I'm only about halfway through my career," she laughed.

"Lichens and mosses," Lesher then emphasized, "are often taken for granted because of their simple structure and small size. But they contribute significantly to the ecology of forests and other plant communities."

"For instance," she added, "lichens and mosses are generally the first forms of plant life to colonize in an otherwise barren area. They also intercept rainfall and fog, which aids growth of other vegetation. They are indicators of air quality. They are a food and nesting source to birds and animals and contribute to biological diversity."

"So, if I was able to discover yet a new species of moss, then, to me, that emphasizes the value of the work that ecologists perform for USDA—and for the country." ■

—RON HALL

Federal Records...continued from pg. 1

are made or received by an agency of the U.S. government under federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business, *and* (2) are preserved, or appropriate for preservation, as evidence of agency activities or because of the value of the information they contain.

"In layperson's terms," she said, "federal records are essentially those documents which protect the legal, financial, and other interests of the U.S. Government and its citizenry; and/or assist Departmental officials—and their successors—to make informed policy and program judgments; and/or provide the information required by Congress and others for oversight of the Department's activities."

"With all that in mind," she advised, "to ascertain whether these items qualify as 'federal records,' all correspondence, memos, e-mails, case files, photographs, maps, videos, motion pictures, tape recordings, data bases, spreadsheets, and computer tapes—and, reflecting more recent technology, all DVDs, CDs, websites, and computerized presenta-

tions—in an employee's custody need to be measured against that definition."

LaCour underscored out that the essential qualifying characteristics relate to the information contained in the source document—and not its physical form or format.

"As federal employees, we always need to keep in mind that official federal records belong to the federal government, not to any individual employee," emphasized **Bruce Bundick**, director of the Department's Office of the Executive Secretariat.

In fact, LaCour pointed out that DR 3080-001 states "The concealment, mutilation, obliteration, falsification, or unauthorized removal or destruction of Federal records is against the law and may lead to a \$2,000 fine, three years imprisonment, or both, and forfeiture of his position and disqualification from holding any other Federal office..."

LaCour noted that, in contrast to federal records, "nonrecord materials" and "personal records" may be removed or destroyed by an employee at any time.

"Nonrecord materials" include

such items as transmittal letters and memos, as well as extra reference or convenience copies of documents.

"Personal records" include such items as papers accumulated by an employee before entering federal service; private materials in the office that were not created or received in the course of transacting federal business; and work-related personal papers that are not used in the transaction of federal business.

LaCour advised that, to avoid even the appearance of impropriety, all personal materials should be maintained separately from official files.

"In this new era of 'eGovernment,' the days of thinking that records are only something you can hold in your hand, like a piece of paper, are long past," she observed.

"So we need to realize that when we delete any information created electronically, we may be destroying the only copy of that information. And we need to be aware of the ramifications of decisions we make concerning the disposition of electronic records."

She said that OCIO's website offers additional guidance on this matter. Click on www.ocio.usda.gov/records/tools_records.html

In addition, the National Archives and Records Administration has published a 16-page booklet, dated March 2004 and titled "Documenting Your Public Service," concerning this subject.

"The great value in archiving federal records," LaCour affirmed, "is they ensure that each of us in the federal government in general—and, of course, also here in USDA—can reconstruct the evolution of our program and administrative decisions without relying on word-of-mouth. Plus, they give our successors a written rationale for actions we've taken. And they leave an enduring record—part of the 'institutional memory'—that reflects the special contributions each of us has made."

"So I strongly advise not removing or destroying them—unless you're sure that you're legally correct in doing so. Your individual agency's records management officer can help you make the proper decisions on this matter." ■



General Counsel **Nancy Bryson** (right) leans firmly into her pitch as she unleashes a high, hard one at the "dunk button." Inside the "dunk tank," Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs **Bill Hawks**—who is already soaking wet—smiles gamely as he awaits the accuracy of her aim. This activity, which took place on November 8 in the Patio of the Whitten Building at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC, was a fundraiser for the annual Combined Federal Campaign. Other officials who volunteered to be dunked for charity—and all of them did get soaked—including Chief of Staff **Dale Moore**, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment **Mark Rey**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights **Paul Gutierrez**, NRCS Chief **Bruce Knight**, FSA Administrator **Jim Little**, White House Liaison **Drew DeBerry**, and Deputy Press Secretary **Ed Loyd**. According to NRCS writer-editor **Mark Bushman**, this USDA employee initiative grossed over \$2,000 for CFC. Note the related photo on page 3.—**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH**



Help Us Find Johnathan King

Missing: 10-9-2004

From: Hardy, VA

D.O.B. 2-7-1988

Sex: Male

Hair: Brown

Eyes: Hazel

Height: 5 ft. 10 in.

Weight: 140 lbs.

If you have information, please call

1-800-843-5678

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN

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"Science, Policy, Markets—What's Ahead?"

Arlington, Va.

(202) 720-5447 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)

www.usda.gov.oce/forum

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